



Reintroduction of Whooping Cranes to Southwest Louisiana



“When you watch an adult Whooper stride close by you, his head high and proud, his bearing arrogant and imposing, you feel the presence of a strength and of a stubborn will to survive. We have a strong conviction that the Whooping Crane will keep his part of the bargain and will fight for survival every inch of the way. **What are we going to do to help?**”

Robert P. Allen, 1950

Did You Know?

WHOOPING CRANES...

- are the tallest N. American bird. Males height reaches up to 5 ft.
- have a wingspan of up to 7 ft.
- are all white except for black feathers on the tips of their wings; and have dark olive-gray bills, which lighten in color during breeding season.
- are cinnamon brown when immature and take on a mottled appearance as their white feather bases begin to extend.
- live approximately 22-24 years in the wild.
- are omnivorous. Summer forage includes frogs, fish, rodents, small birds, and berries. Winter feeding centers on blue crabs and clams.
- form life-long, monogamous pairs, though they will re-pair after the death of mate.
- make a spring migration to Wood Buffalo National Park located in northeastern Alberta and southern Northwest Territories, Canada.
- They occupy approximately the same area within the breeding territory each year.
- share parental duties, such as egg incubation and brood-rearing, between mates.
- begin an autumn migration in September and reach their Texas Gulf Coast destination by late October or early November.
- today about 400 whooping cranes survive in three populations in the wild, and about 150 individuals in cap-



Decline of a Species...

Fifteen species of cranes occur throughout the world, with two of the fifteen species occurring in North America. Today, sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) are prevalent, but whooping cranes (*Grus americana*) have suffered severe population decline and their numbers are in peril. Due to this decline, whooping cranes were first added to the federal status of an endangered species on March 11, 1967. As of January 5, 2010 approximately 551 individuals remain (Stehn 2010).

The southwest corner of Louisiana was once an important area of the whooping crane's winter range and until the mid-twentieth century, the home of the United States' last resident whooping crane colony. Due to their historical presence in Louisiana, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) plans to establish a self-sustaining whooping crane population on and around White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WLWCA) located in Vermilion parish, in southwest Louisiana.



The goals of the project are to establish a self-sustaining whooping crane population on and around WLWCA. A self-sustaining population is defined as a flock with 130 individuals and 30 nesting pairs that survive for 10 years without any additional restocking. Additionally, we hope our efforts will lead the species to be down-listed from an endangered species to a threatened species.

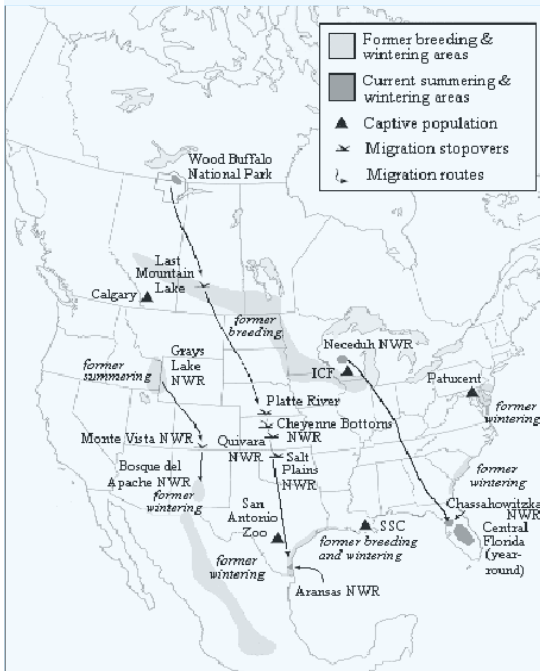
The first scheduled release is set for February 2011. For the first winter, 10 juvenile birds are tentatively set for release at WLWCA. Contingent upon the first year's success, one to two cohorts (6-8 birds) will be released in subsequent years for ten years. Birds will be monitored closely throughout the duration of the project.



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Past and Present Whooping Crane Breeding and Wintering Grounds



History Of Louisiana Whooping Cranes...

- 1890's. Records indicate "large numbers" of both whooping cranes and sandhill cranes on wet prairies year-round and whooping cranes also used coastal locations in winter.
- 1890's-1920. Conversion of prairies to mechanized agriculture leads to both whooping and sandhill crane numbers declining in the prairie region.
- 1918. 12 whooping cranes shot north of Sweet Lake. Last official record of whooping cranes on the Louisiana prairies.
- 1930's. Trappers report whooping crane nesting activity and young in the freshwater marshes north of White Lake.
- May 1939. Biologist John J. Lynch (U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey (pre USFWS)) sights 13 whooping cranes north of White Lake. Two of the cranes are "young-of-the-year." This record confirms a resident colony of breeding whooping cranes in Louisiana. This is the last record of the species breeding in the wild in the United States prior to experimental and captive-raised whooping cranes hatching several eggs and fledging chicks starting in 2000 and 2002, respectively.
- Late 1930's-early 1940's. Last records of wintering whooping cranes on southwest Louisiana's chenier ridges and in brackish and saltwater marshes near the coast.
- August 1940. Hurricane and flood from associated rainfall scatters the resident White Lake whooping cranes. Only 6 cranes return.
- November 1941. One of the "lost" cranes of White Lake is found in Evangeline Parish after the storm. She is captured and donated to the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans. The bird is named "Josephine;" for many years, she was the only breeding female whooping crane in captivity.
- 1941-1945. White Lake whooping crane flock loses 1 bird each year...only 2 cranes remain in 1945.
- 1947. Only 1 whooping crane remains at White Lake.
- March 1950. John J Lynch and others chase and capture the lone White Lake crane, which is transported to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas.

** Based on Louisiana whooping crane chronology compiled by Dr. Gay Gomez, McNeese State University**

